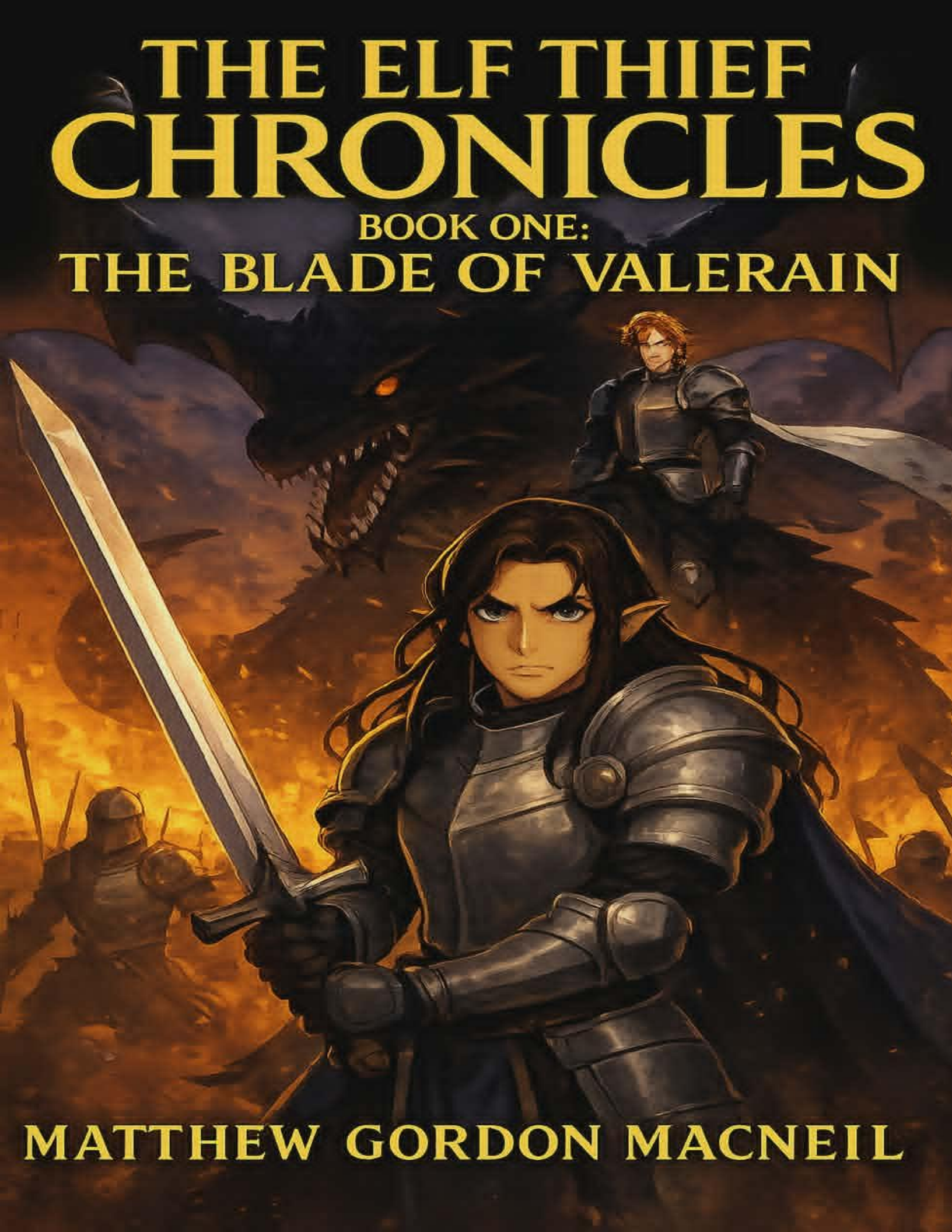
THE ELF THIEF CHRONICLES

BOOK ONE:
THE BLADE OF VALERAIN



MATTHEW GORDON MACNEIL

The Elf Thief Chronicles, Book One: The Blade of Valerain

By Matthew Gordon MacNeil

(Author's Note: I originally wrote this way back in 2017 but never published it anywhere. I decided to share it now as I don't believe in hiding writing away. I have kept the spelling and grammar the same as the last time I edited it years ago so if you see mistakes that is why. I hope you enjoy the story and thank you for reading!)

Ezekiel's hands moved quietly, slowly opening up the purse, his victim unaware of what he was doing, being to preoccupied at the stall. Once he securely had the purse opened, he gently shuffled around the items inside, feeling for coins.

'Come on,' he couldn't find any, and quickly retracted his hand before the woman noticed him.

Leaving the woman behind, Ezekiel strolled over to another stall in the market, eyeing a Dwarven man who seemed to have a big bag of gold on his side.

The Dwarf, known locally as Snorri Greylock, due to his long grey hair, had never liked Ezekiel, calling the young elf a half breed, because he was born of a human father and elven mother.

Snorri looked over the meat the stall was offering, like the woman, he never noticed Ezekiel coming up behind him.

'See how you like this ya bastard,' Ezekiel easily snatched Snorri's bag of gold, passing behind a corner before the Dwarf even knew his money was gone!

Ezekiel didn't get far before he heard Snorri's voice behind him,

"GET BACK HERE WITH MY MONEY!"

The Dwarf's voice ripped apart the silence of the alleyway, his harsh tone sent a violent chill down Ezekiel's spine, making him twitch.

"It's my money now," the thief said, continuing to walk away, his hands tensing in his pockets.

"Boy, don't test me, I'll cut your pointy ears off and feed em too you!"

"Try it short stack," Ezekiel said, not knowing what he would do if Snorri actually attacked him.

Taking a blade from his belt, Snorri rushed Ezekiel, who never had time to even turn around, being tackled onto the ground. Snorri stabbed down hard, sinking the blade into the shoulder, he stabbed again and once more it went through the shoulder, near the first wound. Ezekiel could only scream in agony, Snorri, despite his short size, was too strong to push off.

"I told you to give me back my gold," The Dwarf raised his weapon for one final strike into Ezekiel's heart,

"Leave the elf alone," a woman suddenly came from behind Greylock, wrapping her arm around his throat, holding a dagger to it.

"Leave the boy alone Snorri, or I won't hesitate to slice your throat open here and now."

Greylock dropped his knife, slowly getting off Ezekiel,

"You'll pay," Snorri growled, pointing at Ezekiel before walking away.

"Thank you...Ms?"

"Caterina, we need to talk."

The old hut was cold, the paint of the walls were peeling off, and small holes in the roof let rain drops fall in every time it poured. But, despite it's run down state, it was Ezekiel's home and he was proud of it.

"Have you always lived here?"

"No, uh, I used to live in the countryside, in the village of Neermarsh with my parents, but four years ago bandits raided it, killing everyone they could get their hands on, including my father and mother. I moved to Havenfield afterwards."

"How did you survive the attack?"

"I was away at the time, hunting. When I got back, the smoke was rising and everything was burnt to ashes. I buried my parents, gave them their last rites, then decided that

Havenfield would be the best place for me."

As Ezekiel explained his story, Caterina couldn't help but stare at him. His face was lean and handsome, his nose aquiline but not pointy, his eyes chocolate brown, his long dark brown hair black in the dark room. His ears, like all elves, whether half or full, were pointed, medium in length. A small moustache and beard adorned his face. His body was average, not too skinny, but not chubby, and his voice was soft but low in tone.

"Why did you turn to a life of crime?"

"Invalon has never been the most loving Kingdom when it comes to my kind. Sure, a few elves have obtained good jobs, but for the most part we are restricted to menial labour, but even then, we don't usually get work. I couldn't find a job once I got to here, so pick pocketing became the only choice I had. I'm not proud of what I do, nor do I like it, but honestly it's all I have."

Ezekiel leaned against his shelf, resting an arm on it, reading the strange woman's face.

"What did you want to talk to me about?"

"I have been studying your skills for a long time," Caterina admitted, a smile crossing her lips,

"Your skill as a thief is most....impressive to say the least, though you need some better training. I work for a Guild

which trains thieves from throughout the Four Kingdoms. I have reported you to my master, and he is most intrigued by you, he wants me to offer you an opportunity to come to Arran, to the city of Horik, where he'll train you personally."

The expression on Ezekiel's face was a mixture of puzzlement and humour, he couldn't believe what Caterina was saying,

'Joining a Thieves Guild?! Is she nuts?'

Sensing his feelings, Caterina quickly pulled a large sack of gold from her pocket,

"We are willing to pay you to come."

"Didn't you just hear what I said? I don't like being a thief, I only do it to stay alive, one day I hope to be able to make an honest living. I'm sorry, but I can't go to Arran with you."

"Don't you understand? We can give you the skills you need to raise enough money so that you don't need to be a thief anymore. After you amassed enough gold you won't need to rob people, you could live a life of ease within a few short years.

The Grandmaster will help you meet your goals, just come with me. If you don't like it, you can always come back here, just give us a chance."

Seeing the sincerity in Caterina's eyes, Ezekiel's mind danced

back and forth, should he take the deal or not take the deal? Should he stay or go?

"Do you promise I can return to Invalon if I choose too?"

"Yes, we don't hold anyone against their will."

"Alright, I will go to Arran with you. Let me pack my things."

Leaving the gates of Havenfield on horseback, Ezekiel and Caterina headed towards the border with the Kingdom of Arran, a mountainous region where few border patrols were seen, the mountains themselves were believed by many to be good enough to keep any wandering warband out, as the Kingdom of Arran was notorious for sending small raiding parties against neighbouring Kingdoms.

The journey to the border would be long, they had to pass through the forest of Cathiness, a large maze of trees, inhabited, legends said, by Nereids who lured travelers to their deaths. Too make matters worse, neither one of them had a map.

"How did you find your way through here before?"

"I didn't come this way," Caterina answered, watching as Ezekiel shook his head in disbelief,

"I arrived in Havenfield by ship, maybe we should have..." She

trailed off, knowing it was too late.

"Great, just great. We could have taken a ship, which would have been much easier, but instead, you drag me through this damn forest. What's more, you don't even know the way!" Ezekiel, not wanting to explode into a rage, left their camp, saying he was going to explore.

The moist forest floor mushed beneath his feet as he walked, the night breeze cool against his skin. The relaxing atmosphere helped Ezekiel calm down, breathing in a mouthful of air, he sat down beneath a tree.

'Why did I even come? I should have known something would happen.'

Looking out into the forest, he couldn't help but imagine how endless it was, how vast. Letting his mind worry, he began thinking he would be lost forever, then, out of nowhere, he heard singing.

The sound was coming from behind him, near a lake. The sweetest voice he had ever heard, singing in a language he could not understand. Slowly making his way to the lake, he looked around for the source of the singing, seeing nothing, but yet the singing continued. Going by the lake, Ezekiel stood there enchanted, a blissful feeling washed over him, causing

him to lay down and fall asleep.

"Mother! Father!" Ezekiel bent over the bodies of his slain parents, their blood oozing over his hands as he hugged them. Fire and smoke swirled around him, Neermarsh was burning to ashes, sounds of the dying echoed in the boy's ears.

"Please don't leave me," he wanted to cry, he felt the choking sensation in his throat, but the tears wouldn't come.

A roar behind him made Ezekiel turn quickly around, to see a man with a sword raised charging at him.

"Ezekiel!"

Caterina's voice jerked him awake, he bolted upright too see the night sky had given way to a clear, sunny morning.

"I'm over here, by the lake."

Rubbing his eyes of sleep, he saw her appear, rushing towards him in a worried state.

Grabbing a hold of his shirt, she put her face close to his, so that he could see clearly her crystal green eyes, a lock of her flaming red hair hung down as well. He could tell her anger was just as fiery as her hair.

"Why didn't you come back last night?" Her hand was squeezing his shirt, pinching his skin,

"Ouch!"

"Don't be such a baby, where were you?"

"I was sitting down under a tree when all of a sudden, I heard singing. It was the most incredible sound you ever heard I swear. Wanting to see who was the owner of the voice, I came to the lake where the voice was coming from, but no one was here. Then, without warning, a warm, peaceful sensation washed over me, and I was out like a light."

The expression on her face made him think she didn't buy what he was saying, but she let him go regardless.

Back at the camp, as they were preparing to continue on their journey, Caterina wouldn't speak to Ezekiel at all, ignoring him every time he tried to talk about the Guild, Horik, or even her herself, she gave him the cold shoulder completely, so that eventually he just went about getting himself ready to leave and stopped trying to talk.

The Cathiness forest was like a maze, but like any maze, one can get out. It took a few days of twisting and turning in

different directions for them to finally realize which way was the right way, but once they did, it took them no time at all to leave Cathiness in the dust.

Approaching the border between Invalon and Arran, Ezekiel beheld the mountain of Shiloh for the first time. Shiloh was a huge mountain range which marked the border between the two Kingdoms, small paths into the mountain had been made throughout the preceding centuries, but by and large, it was wild country, filled with pockets of small forests and barren rock.

"Looks like a climb," Caterina said, kicking her horse forward,

"Yeah, should be fun," Ezekiel mumbled sarcastically.

The way up the mountain took it's toll on Ezekiel's mount. Exhausted, the poor horse collapsed, throwing it's rider to the ground.

"Ezekiel!" Caterina jumped down off her horse and made her way to him.

"I'm fine, I'm alright."

He slowly sat up with her help, looking at his horse.

"She's suffering."

Caterina took her knife from her belt, walked over to the horse, and swiftly slashed it's throat, ending the animal's life in seconds.

The surrounding area was mostly woods, with a few barren patches of rock. It wasn't the most cozy place to spend the night, but the two had little choice, so, beside a withered Oak, they set up camp.

"How did you become a member of the Thieves Guild?"

"It's a long story," she said, taking a drink from her water jug.

"So tell it," Ezekiel gestured with his hand,

"We have all night."

"Alright."

"I was born in the Kingdom of Stonehall, in the small town of Kaston on the second day of Daros, in the tenth year of King Valentinian, making me twenty eight years old.

My father, Robert Achillus, was a miner, the son of miner, whose family originally came from the island of Desi in the Isisian sea, who went to Stonehall seeking work. My mother, Livia Sunderland, came from a family of blacksmiths, her father fought for King Valentinian in a war against Arran before her birth."

"So how did you, a girl who seemingly comes from a modest

family background, become a thief?"

"I was rebellious I suppose, not wanting to be this elegant lady my mother envisioned, or the daddy's girl my father hoped for. Instead, I struck out on my own around fourteen, leaving Kaston and heading for the capital city, Etheraal, where I fell into a life of crime. Two years later Dustan, the Grandmaster of the Thieves Guild found me, offered me a position working for him, and that was that, been in the Guild ever since."

Ezekiel pondered Caterina's words for a minute, mentally imagining her life up until now, then, he asked her something,

"Did you ever see your parents again?"

"Once, three years after I left home. I was working a job in a nearby village and decided to pay them a visit. Naturally I tried my best to conceal what my profession was, pretending to be a barmaid, not exactly what they had in mind for me, but better than a criminal. However, soon after my arrival, my father found a letter written to me by Dustan in my travel bag. He flew into a rage, demanding to know why I betrayed the family. In the end, they kicked me out, I never went back."

Caterina looked at Ezekiel for a few seconds, then laid down to sleep, leaving him to think about all of what she just said.

In the morning the two of them continued on their journey, Ezekiel hitching a ride on the back of Caterina's mount. The way ahead comprised of steep slopes down hill, leading to the main road going into Arran.

"What is Arran like?"

"It's a peaceful Kingdom for the most part, mainly farmland, a few cities are scattered throughout the land, Horik is the biggest. Arran is ruled by Queen Sophia Faroh, who came to power last year upon the death of her father, old King Marius."

Ezekiel smirked, it was rare for a woman to rule in her own right,

"What kind of woman is the Queen?"

"Stern, merciless when she has to be, but fair, the people love her. The Thieves Guild? Not so much."

Ezekiel chuckled at this, knowing the reason why, Caterina gave him a gentle whack on the shoulder, grinning as she did so.

The main road leading to Horik was well paved, making it easy for farmers in the area to bring their produce and animals to market. The paved roads also made it easy for warbands to

move quickly, something the Queen appreciated, being one who liked to display her martial prowess. Farmhouses lined the road, with the occasional inn along the way.

Stopping at a local inn called The Black Night Inn, Caterina and Ezekiel decided to rent a room for the evening, knowing they wouldn't be able to make it to the city in the dark.

While Caterina was getting some sleep, Ezekiel, needing some fresh air, went outside, where he stood next to the inn door, taking in the cool night air.

Out of nowhere, the singing he had heard in the Cathiness forest arose, coming from behind the inn. It was more beautiful than before, almost siren like in it's soothing melody, drawing him to it. Heading to the back of the inn, Ezekiel was stunned to see a woman, bright golden light glowing around her, her skin white as snow, her long chocolate brown hair tied into a ponytail.

Hypnotized by her beauty, he almost didn't notice the woman's most distinguishing feature, her wings. They were as white as her skin, coming from her shoulders, they shot out, it was then that Ezekiel realized the woman was a Fairy, a creature of immense power.

"Ezekiel Reuvain," the words echoed in his mind, he knew

they were from the woman, yet her lips remained still.

"The destiny of Arran is in your hands, the time of the Dragon is almost upon us."

'Time of the Dragon?' Before he could demand answers from the woman, she disappeared in a blast of light, leaving the Elf thief alone standing in the darkness.

Horik, as the capital of Arran, was a massive fortress city, with walls spanning all around the city, four guard towers guarded the four gates of entry, and a large garrison patrolled the city streets. Built four centuries before by King Horik Faroh, the city had become the greatest military centre in the Four Kingdoms, hosting a garrison of over two thousand warriors, most of whom, only came to the city periodically while serving in the outlying villages.

Caterina led Ezekiel into the city, keeping him as close as possible so he couldn't get lost in the mass of people crowding the streets. Looking around him, Ezekiel saw that every race in the land was there, elves, humans, Dwarves, Gnomes, and even a few Gnolls, the Hyena people of the Southern Isles, known for their ferocity in battle and their hatred of elves due to one hundred years of elven dominion of their homeland.

The Gnolls stared at him intensely, their leader in particular

wouldn't keep his eyes off of Ezekiel, he stood by a store door staring while Ezekiel and Caterina walked by. Once they were far enough away, the leader pointed towards them and five Gnolls started following.

"We're being followed," Ezekiel whispered under his breath, tugging a bit on Caterina's jacket,

"By who?"

"Gnolls, their leader must have sent them after me."

"It's alright, see that ally," Caterina gestured slightly with her eyes,

"We'll turn there, take out our daggers, and make a stand,"

Ezekiel wasn't pleased with her solution, but he had little choice.

Rounding the corner into the ally, the two thieves quickly drew their daggers. Caterina pulled out two, their blades made of pure sliver. Ezekiel's, when compared to hers, was anything but impressive, but it was sharp, and that was what mattered. When the five Gnolls appeared, Caterina grinned devilishly.

The battle began when one of the Gnolls lunged at Ezekiel, twisting his sword to plunge directly into the elf's stomach,

but Caterina got in front of the Hyena and deflected it, slashing the Gnoll's throat in the process.

Another Gnoll, seeing his companion drop, released a throwing knife, which hit Caterina in the thigh. Letting out a loud scream, she quickly regained composure, drawing out the knife and hurling it back at the Gnoll, hitting it in the chest, killing it instantly.

Not wanting to be outdone, Ezekiel took his dagger and ran at the Gnoll closest to him, only to be kicked in the stomach, falling to the ground in unspeakable amounts of pain.

The Gnoll, a heavy set beast with black spots all over his head and two fang like teeth protruding from his mouth, got on top of him, screaming an insult in the Gnollic language.

"Caterina, a little help here?!"

Ezekiel braced himself for whatever the Gnoll planned to do, knowing full well it would lead to his death.

Caterina finished off two of the other Hyena folk and then rushed to her charge's defence, bringing down her dagger on the Gnoll's back, stabbing him multiple times before pulling his head back and slicing his throat.

"Took your sweet time huh?" Ezekiel's sarcasm wasn't in a

serious tone, however his eyes spoke volumes,

"Well when you dive headlong at an armed opponent, what do you expect to happen? Battle isn't a game, it's life or death, you need to be---wait, where did the other Gnoll go?"

The two looked around, seeing no sign of it, then they saw it coming back, with the leader.

The Gnoll leader was a giant, standing over nine feet in height, his fur was pure black, a rare colour in the Hyena people. His arms and legs were virtual tree trunks, with muscular veins coursing through them, he growled low at his subordinate, apparently telling him to stay back, then he reached behind his back and brought forth his Battle Axe.

"Stay here, if anything happens, run towards the center of the city, Dustan set up a vendor stand there, he will help you."

"What, wait? You can't fight him alone! He'll kill you!"

"Don't underestimate me elf boy, now stay back." Caterina gave him a sweet smile before charging at the Gnoll leader, her dagger looking puny compared with his Battle Axe.

In one swing it was all over. The Gnoll leader swung downwards, cutting into Caterina's skull, driving her lifeless body to the ground.

Ezekiel, motionless for a moment, overcame his shock to

follow Caterina's last orders, he ran.

He could hear the Gnoll leader's growls behind him, he could hear the Gnoll warrior speaking in their language, telling it's leader something Ezekiel could only guess at. The elf ran faster than he ever had before, passing by market stalls and people who were oblivious to his situation. He looked swiftly in all directions, trying to see if he could find Dustan, even though he neither knew what the man looked like or where exactly his stall was.

He could feel the Gnolls gaining up on him, he knew if he didn't find Dustan fast, he would join Caterina in death.

Just before he was about to give up hope, he spotted a sign on a corn vendor which read 'Dustan's corn and beef stand.,' his heart almost burst out of his chest, being given new energy, Ezekiel ran straight for the Stall.

"Help me! You need to help me!" The man at the Stall stared at the elf for a second before his eyes moved to the giant Gnoll a mere inch behind him.

"Geraai! Do not touch this boy."

The Gnoll leader immediately stopped and glared at the man, showing his fangs threateningly,

"Bah! Do you truly believe you can threaten me you rabid fool? Attack me and you and every one of your men will hang, do I make myself clear?"

Geraai snarled his displeasure, but did not advance further, instead turning back around and leaving the area.

"Thank the Gods that's over," Dustan said with relief in his voice,

"I was a bit afraid they would ripe us both apart!"

Ezekiel, who had fallen to the ground from exhaustion, stared up at the Thieve's Guild leader, seeing a balding, short, chubby blue eyed man with a blond goatee rubbing his chin.

"Are you Dustan?"

"I am, and who in blazing Hades are you boy?"

"Ezekiel Reuvain of Havenfield, you sent Caterina to find me sir."

Dustan's eyes went wide,

"Where's Caterina?"

"Dead....The Gnoll you called Geraai murdered her."

The Gnolls house was on the outskirts of Horik, more akin to a small fortress than anything, having five guards posted outside, and even a lookout on the roof.

Dustan, Ezekiel, and another elf named Kelrora awaited nightfall outside the house, planning a raid to rid Horik of the Gnolls presence once and for all, and grabbing revenge for Caterina in the process.

Ezekiel's thoughts kept returning to Caterina, he felt guilty for her death, believing that if he had had done something, she wouldn't have been killed. Dustan, a warm hearted man from the moment Ezekiel met him, tried easing his newly found pupil's guilt, reminding him that there was nothing he could have done, though Ezekiel refused to believe him.

As dusk passed into night, the three thieves began preparing for the fight ahead. Kelrora, a Wood elf from the Western half of the Great Velonai forest, prayed to the Goddess Rhianna, a protector of the elven peoples, asking her to keep them alive this night.

Dustan simply sharpened his sword one final time, while Ezekiel watched Kelrora pray, feeling helpless.

At around ten, they approached the house, weapons drawn.

"I'll handle Geraai," Dustan said, looking first at Kelrora, then at Ezekiel,

"You two focus on killing the guards and the lookout, understood?"

"We understand," Kelrora answered for the both of them, getting a look of displeasure from Ezekiel in return.

Ezekiel and Kelrora dispatched the two Gnoll guards rather easily, both stabbing each in the chest while pretending to ask them a question. With the guards dead, the three entered the house undetected, Dustan went one way, Ezekiel and Kelrora another.

"The Gnolls shouldn't even be allowed in the land," Kelrora said as they passed a corner heading towards the roof,

"They hate our people and try every chance they get to kill us. They are vermin."

"That's exactly how they view us," Ezekiel murmured, not liking the Xenophobia in his companion's words,

"If we start thinking like them, we are no better than them,"

Kelrora ignored his response, instead she pushed on ahead of him.

The lookout was small, leaving them to conclude that she was probably a female Gnoll. Though, despite her height, she was well built, and sported two short swords at her hips.

She didn't hear them come up the stairs, thus giving them an advantage. In unison, the two charged at the Gnoll, slashing and hacking into her, leaving a bloody mess when they were finished.

"Let's go find Dustan, I want to personally watch him gut Geraai," Ezekiel said sweetly, his eyes flashing in the moonlight.

They found Dustan in the cellar, where Geraai had his personal quarters. The Gnoll leader had him pinned to the ground, trying to rip out his throat with his jaws.

"Come on," Ezekiel whispered,

"We need to help Dustan, we need to end this now," pulling his sword out of it's sheath, he moved towards the Gnoll.

Kelrora watched him get closer and closer to the beast, who seemed not to notice him, too busy trying to dig it's fangs into the Guild leader's neck. Getting close enough, Ezekiel let out a loud cry,

"FOR CATERINA!" In one hard cut, Geraai collapsed dead,

head rolling into the wall.

"Ezekiel," the voice came from the grey mist, which circled around him, sending chills down his spine.

"Ezekiel," the voice called again, sounding more familiar this time,

"Who is it? What do you want with me!" His yell echoed throughout the mist, still he could not see anyone within, then, she appeared.

"Caterina?!"

Caterina stepped out from the mist, looking exactly as she did in life. Her red hair as fiery as ever, her green eyes staring back at Ezekiel, she gave him a smile to reassure him everything was alright.

"The Kingdom is in danger," she said,

"Dragons are coming from the east, led by a human rider, Varro Rykash, the Dragon Lord of Thera. He comes to conquer Arran."

A long pause followed, Ezekiel couldn't believe she was really there, let alone what she had just said. After minutes of silence, he finally spoke,

"Why are you here Caterina?"

"I am your Guide, chosen to be by your side until the last day of your life."

"My Guide? Why?"

"Because, without guidance you will fail, and if you fail, the Kingdom of Arran will fall, and Varro will win, slowly conquering the other Kingdoms. The High Goddess Raya has chosen you to save the Kingdoms. You must find the Blade of Valerain, only it has the magic strong enough to combat Varro's Dragons and necromancy. You must travel to the tomb of the elven King Malacari, the first warrior to ever wield the blade, and retrieve it."

"Malacari?"

"Yes, King Malacari of Danaan was given the Blade of Valerain eight hundred years ago by the High Goddess so that he could save his people from extinction at the hands of humans. He led his people into a great battle using the blade, cutting down thousands with his own hands, thanks to the blade's magic. After Malacari ensured that elvenkind would survive, he never fought with the weapon again, realizing how dangerous it could be if it fell into the wrong hands. Before he died, he ordered that Valerain be buried alongside him, so that it's magic could never be used for evil."

"The Tomb can be found outside Danaan's capital, Llwyeln, situated near Lake Dal. Take Kelrora with you, her mother was from Llweyln, and she spent some time there as a child. Now Ezekiel, wake up!"

Jolting up, he was shaking, but he followed Caterina's instructions. He equipped himself, grabbing his sword, dagger, and a pack of food supplies. He explained to Dustan he was going to visit relatives in Danaan, knowing the Guild leader had no idea he was lying. Dustan was a little bit unsure of sending Kelrora, but in the end he consented, sending them off with a party, knowing it would be months before they saw them again. The next morning, the two elves set off towards Danaan.

"So, why did you leave Danaan?"

Ezekiel asked the question while the two crossed over a bridge, the border marker between Danaan and Arran, a row of trees grew on each side.

"Many reasons, but mainly because I felt my talents would be....well, more appreciated outside of Danaan, elves don't take kindly to thieves. My mother, Rhianna rest her soul, stood beside me even while she knew what I was doing. She's

buried outside of Llweyln's gates, would you mind if I visited her grave?"

"Of course not, I will pay my respects as well."

As they rode down the forested path, Ezekiel took a long look at Kelrora, something he hadn't done before. She was a beautiful woman, tall and elegant, her skin was tanned brown, like all Wood elves. Her ears were long and slender, her hair an auburn colour, with red highlights in it which showed every time the sun was out. Her nose, like her ears, was slender and cute, her lips were thin but rosy red. Her body slim, her chest was neither small nor busty, but somewhere in between.

It took them a week to reach Llweyln, going through the Keltaine forest, passing by the village of Ladaaon, until finally the city lay before them.

Llweyln wasn't any different than Horik or Havenfield, it had walls surrounding it, with guard towers outside in order to spot any threat. What made the city stand out however, were the large tombs behind the city, on Lake Dal, and the Great Velonai forest, the original homeland of the Wood elves. The tombs housed the Kings and Queens of the Dal dynasty, the first rulers of Danaan, among them Malacari.

"My mother's grave is there," Kelrora said, pointing to a tree just outside of the city gates,

"Lets go."

Looking down at the headstone, carved into an arrow point, a distinguishing mark of Wood elven culture, Ezekiel read the text,

'Diana Cassi, wife, mother, and beloved friend.'

"How did she pass away," He asked, his gaze still fixed on the text,

"Of sickness five years back. It took her swiftly, leaving nothing but bones behind." Kelrora choked up, Ezekiel gently hugging her, trying to give whatever little comfort he could.

Once they were done visiting Kelrora's mother's grave, Ezekiel, thinking off the top of his head, suggested they go to visit King Malacari's tomb, out of respect for how great the man was. Kelrora, not thinking anything of it, agreed, and so they walked around Lake Dal, until they were standing at the entrance of the King's tomb.

"I would like to go inside," Ezekiel smiled, hoping Kelrora wouldn't object.

"I'll wait out here for you," she said flatly, giving him a faint smile. After not being able to convince her, he went in alone.

The inside of the tomb was surprisingly modest, especially for a King of Malacari's stature. Plain white marble walls, a plain dirt floor, no decorations anywhere, no religious icons or any other cultural symbol, it was completely devoid of anything which would make the tomb interesting. Ezekiel slowly stepped towards the sarcophagus, believing Valerain inside it.

"Wait!" He drew his sword and spun around, shocked to see Caterina standing behind him.

"What's wrong?"

"The sword, if you pull it out, will trigger a trap, a magical spell Malacari put in place to ensure the sword would always remain beside his corpse. Let me draw it out, go wait outside."

Without uttering another word, he did as she instructed, sheathing his sword and making his way out of the tomb.

Outside Kelrora was sitting on the grass, eating some berries she had found. When she saw Ezekiel, she asked casually,

"Did you see a ghost?"

"You have no idea."

All of a sudden, the ground began shaking, then the tomb collapsed, Ezekiel tackled Kelrora, in order to protect her in case falling debris hit her.

When everything was quiet again, they both stood up, stunned at the rubble now at their feet.

"What just happened!?" The panic in Kelrora's voice was obvious, her green eyes expressing absolute fear. Ezekiel, realizing Caterina must have activated the trap when she took the sword out of Malacari's sarcophagus, hoped it was undamaged.

"Here it is," they both turned to see Caterina standing next to the rubble, holding Valerain in her hand.

Kelrora fainted from fear, Ezekiel catching her before she hit the ground.

"Take the sword and hurry back to Arran, Varro and his Dragons are almost there."

He took Valerain in his hands, the magic began coursing through his veins, sending a feeling of excitement and power through him.

"Go now Ezekiel, Arran's fate rests in your hands."

With that, Caterina disappeared, and Ezekiel, strapping Valerain to his back, carried Kelrora to their horses and made

a get away as guards from Llweyln came to investigate the collapsed tomb.

The Dragon Lord landed on Arran's soil during the early morning, around six too be exact. Ten Dragons accompanied their master, all but one, Varro's own mount, were bright red in colour, all were large beyond belief. The Dragon Lord himself wore black knight armour, forged by the Dwarves of Thera as a gift, or a bribe, either way worked for Varro, as long as it did it's job well.

From the field he landed in, he could make out the city of Horik, the people just waking up to go about their day,

'Sadly today may be their last,'

Varro smiled at his thought, he couldn't care less whether Horik's civilians survived what was to come, all he desired was more territory for his Lordship.

Running his hands along the dirt of the ground, Varro chanted an ancient Therian death song, taught to him by his father, Galbak, who was a renowned mage. The chant would summon the souls of the dead to fight for him, giving him the numbers he needed to take Horik. Once the chant was complete, Varro began seeing the dead materialize, most

were ghostly skeletons, while a few were long dead Dragons of old, which he made sure to summon using a sentence of the Dragon language, Dasul Ecuh Olum. With his army ready, Varro mounted his Dragon, leading the attack.

Seeing smoke from the road, Ezekiel knew that Varro Rykash had arrived. He and Kelrora were coming down the hill towards Horik when they both saw it, the city totally surrounded by an army of skeletons and giant transparent Dragons.

Ezekiel looked at Kelrora, whose face was pale, she had no idea what was going on.

"What's happening?!"

"No time to explain, we need to find a way into the city."

Through an opening in the sewers, Ezekiel and Kelrora were able to sneak inside Horik, making their way underground to the Thieves Guild.

The sewers, as one would expect, stunk of waste, was damp, and dark. Kelrora used a match to give them some light, but it did little good, thankfully Ezekiel had memorized the sewer routes and was able to lead the way with what little light they had.

When they finally reached the manhole beside the Thieves Guild, he went first, pushing the rim with his fingers and slowly pulling himself up.

On the surface, as he quickly saw, everything was chaos. Men and women were screaming, running everywhere trying to find safety. The soldiers were on the city walls firing arrows at the Dragons, both the phantom Dragons and the physical ones. It appeared they were being used to weaken the city's defenses before the ground troops advanced upon the walls.

Together with Kelrora, Ezekiel dodged the running civilians and made his way into the Guild, where he found Dustan in conversation with Sir Eckhart Ronan, Queen Sophia's top general.

"I need your men and women to help in the defense Dustan. For years I have turned a blind eye on your Guild's activities in exchange for a favor, this is the favor I ask."

"Alright, alright! I will allow---" Dustan's word trailed off when he saw Ezekiel and Kelrora standing in front of him.

He rushed over to them, embracing them warmly, astonished they were alive.

"What the hell is going on!"

"The Dragon Lord of Thera is attacking the city Kelrora," Dustan said it in such a matter of fact voice that Ezekiel was surprised the old man was this calm, then again, he probably was in worse situations than this, though Ezekiel couldn't imagine what would be worse than an undead army!

"We need to help the Queen's forces."

"I agree, that's why I am giving General Eckhart command of our thieves, you two included. Follow the General. May Raya bless you both."

Dustan nodded at them and turned away, heading into his study. Eckhart motioned towards the door, and they marched out.

The Queen's army stood lined up before the main city gate, hundreds of men and women ready to charge at a moments notice into the frey of battle, ready to die for their people. Ezekiel and Kelrora, with the rest of the Thieves, followed Eckhart into the army's lines, lining up beside the soldiers.

The general stepped before them all, his hand on his sword pommel.

"Out there is a monstrous army, led by a Dragon Lord, one of the most fearsome warriors on this planet, imbued with both divine and Dragon blood. I cannot promise that most of us will

return from this battle alive, but I can promise that I will fight and die alongside you. We fight for our Kingdom, for our Queen! For our people!"

The general's words weren't as inspiring as he had hoped, the soldiers merely stared at him, Ezekiel smiled in spite of himself.

On Eckhart's command, the gates were opened and the soldiers poured out, heading directly into the skeletal horde.

Ezekiel, Valerain in hand, joined the fight, cutting down several skeleton warriors in minutes, then, inside his mind, he heard Caterina's words,

"Varro must fall, if he does not, Arran's forces have no hope of winning. You must kill him."

Nodding to himself, he dispatched a rather large warrior and went in search of the Dragon Lord.

As Ezekiel went off to find Varro, Kelrora fought alongside Eckhart, standing side by side with him in a shield wall formation.

"Never imagined a Wood elf would be much good in a fight,"

the racist remark didn't faze Kelrora, she was used to human prejudices against her people.

"This one is," was all she said, before killing a skeleton with a swift stab to the forehead.

The shield wall was firm enough for them to push the enemy back a few inches, but they were still in a tough spot. Eckhart cursed under his breath,

"If only we had cavalry!"

"We don't, so we need to make the best of what we have general."

Eckhart's eyes turned to Kelrora, the anger plain as day.

"What did you say to me? You pointed eared bitch!"

Grabbing her by the throat, Eckhart began choking her, squeezing until he felt something pop and Kelrora began jerking around, before going still,

"Elves should learn their place!"

Varro Rykash was flying overhead on his mount when he saw the blue magical energy on the ground. Realizing what it was, he commanded his Dragon to land, so he could see the source for himself.

Upon landing, he was shocked to see an elf standing before him, the sword of power in his hands.

"Varro Rykash I presume," Ezekiel said, his grip tightening on Valerain.

"Indeed I am sharp ears. Where did you get such an excellent weapon?"

Ezekiel didn't respond, instead he lunged, driving his sword into an unsuspecting Varro's chest.

Varro's eyes lit up in pain, blood flowed from his mouth,

"Fool! Did you expect me to fall that easily? I am a Dragon Lord, descended of Raya herself! No mere mortal, let alone an elf, can hope to defeat me!"

Varro threw Ezekiel off him, sending the elf thief crashing to the ground.

Getting up slowly, Ezekiel ran at Varro again, only to be thrown back, not by hand this time, but by magic.

"Give up," the Therian lord demanded,

"I will spare your life, allowing you to spend your days in the dungeon, entertaining the prisoners as a man whore!"

"Tempting offer. But I think I'll just kill you instead."

Ezekiel tried once more to attack Varro, only to be stopped in mid swing by a spell.

"Today Arran is mine, tomorrow, all the Four Kingdoms." Varro began using a spell to crush Ezekiel's heart, holding him in the air, chanting old Therian words,

"Luwa Asshana Baak Raa!"

The pressure began to be too much for Ezekiel to handle, he slipped in and out of consciousness.

"Stay awake! Focus on what's at sake."

Caterina's voice brought back him from death, his eyes popping open, his energy restored.

Allowing Valerain's magic to course through him, he was able to break free of Varro's grip, chopping off his right arm in the process.

"The blood of the Goddess won't save you now," Ezekiel grabbed Rykash by the collar, and summoning all the power within the sword, drove it upwards into Varro's jaw, piercing the top of his skull.

With their master dead, the Dragons flying about the city left,

heading back to their homeland. The army of undead vanishing back to their rest. The battle was over.

As Ezekiel turned from Varro's body, white light surrounded him. Shielding his eyes, he peeked between his fingers to see the same Fairy woman he had encountered behind the Blacknight inn. Slowly, he lowered his hand.

"So the Dragon Lord falls,"

The familiar voice echoed,

"And you stand the victor, the savior of the Four Kingdoms."

The Fairy woman smiled at him, her hand pointing to the sword,

"You are it's guardian now, as Malacari was so many years ago. One day, you will be tested again, the fate of your world will hang in the balance, and only the Blade of Valerain will be able to save it."

She vanished, the light disappearing with her, leaving Ezekiel speechless.

Queen Sophia Faroh sat on her throne in splendor, dressed in golden silk, her black hair tied back into a bun. She did not wear a crown like the typical monarch, but made sure her royal status was always noticed by having Arran's red star

emblem sowed onto every piece of clothing she owned.

She looked at the young warrior before her, surprised in his appearance. He was not imposing, nor did he seem to have any natural fighting abilities, and yet, this man was the one who saved Horik from destruction.

"Ezekiel Reuvain," the Queen said,

"It is with great pleasure that I award you Knighthood for your service to Arran and her people. I am also giving you a manor just outside the city."

"Thank you my Queen, I do not know how to thank you."

She grinned,

"You will thank me by joining my invasion of Thera. You will shed the blood of our enemies, in that way, you will repay me."

"It would be my honour to serve you milady."

"Good, Thera will quake under my power, together we will conquer the island, making Arran a power to be feared."